



Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 109th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 152

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, JULY 13, 2006

No. 91

House of Representatives

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN ED CASE OF HAWAII THURSDAY, JULY 13, 2006

FANNIE LOU HAMER, ROSA PARKS, AND CORETTA SCOTT KING VOTING RIGHTS ACT REAUTHORIZATION AND AMENDMENTS ACT OF 2006

Mr. Chairman, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 9, The Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006, which I am pleased to cosponsor, and in strong opposition to the amendment offered by Congressman CHARLIE NORWOOD.

Over the last 40 years, efforts to renew and restore the VRA have been accomplished on a bipartisan basis. It is in that spirit that we have all worked together to bring the bill before us to the floor today. I would especially like to thank Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner, Judiciary Committee Ranking Member John Conyers, and Congressmen Mel Watt and Steve Chabot for their leadership on this issue.

Voting is the most important duty and right of Americans. By enacting the VRA, we tore down barriers to equal opportunity for minorities at the ballot box, removing the essential political mechanism that maintained the legal structure of segregation. As ruled by the U.S. Supreme Court, the equal right to vote is fundamental because it is "preservative of all rights."

It is with this in mind that I express great concern with the amendment proposed by my colleague, Mr. Norwood, as it essentially seeks to undermine the very means by which the VRA has maintained social justice.

Currently, section 5 of the VRA applies to any state or county where a discriminatory test or device was used as of November 1, 1964, and where less than 50 percent of the voting age resi-

dents of the jurisdiction were registered to vote, or actually voted, in the presidential election of 1964, 1968, or 1972. The Norwood amendment would change the preclearance formula by using rolling voter registration data and voter turn-out data from the three most recent Presidential elections.

My colleague argues that his amendment will "modernize" section 5. I believe that what his amendment really does is change the very focus of the preclearance provision, as it aims to make low voter turnout and registration the issues and not a recorded history of voting discrimination.

In fact, if the Norwood amendment were enacted, it would make my home state of Hawaii--a state without any history whatsoever of voting discrimination--the only preclearance state in our nation. This demonstrates in spades that one cannot reduce discrimination nor the need for federal oversight to so simplistic and mechanistic formula.

Reauthorization of the VRA gives us an opportunity to not only to reflect upon the progress we have made, but to maintain those gains that we have achieved. Adoption of the Norwood amendment would be a giant leap backwards.

I urge my colleagues to oppose the Norwood amendment, and all other weakening amendments, and support final passage of H.R. 9, a true bipartisan bill.

Mahalo, and aloha.